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Inequality of Opportunity and Sustainable Development: Perspectives from India

Sripad Motiram

How do we address concerns regarding the environment and sustainability in the context of the discourse of inequality and equality of opportunity (IOp)? This paper tries to answer the above question by focusing on India. I first examine the philosophical issues raised by considerations of the environment. The attempt here is to both elucidate these issues using the concepts developed in the IOp literature, but also to show the limitations of this literature. I then survey the empirical component of this literature to show that environmental concerns have been relatively under-appreciated. Finally, I assess the quantitative importance of the environment for inequality of opportunity in India. For this purpose, I use both parametric and non-parametric methods and two outcome variables at the household level (income and consumption expenditure). I rely on two sources of data: India Human Development Survey (IHDS) and National Sample Surveys on employment and unemployment situation (NSS). IHDS is a panel survey conducted in 2004-5 and 2011-12, and I use income data from here. The NSS database comprises of repeated cross-sections, and I use consumption expenditure data from here for the years 2004-5, 2011-12, and 2016-17. Preliminary results suggest that environmental circumstances play an important role in influencing outcomes. Their quantitative impact is comparable to, or even higher than the same for other relevant circumstance variables.